



AT MY WINDOW

RUTH A. JOHNSTONE



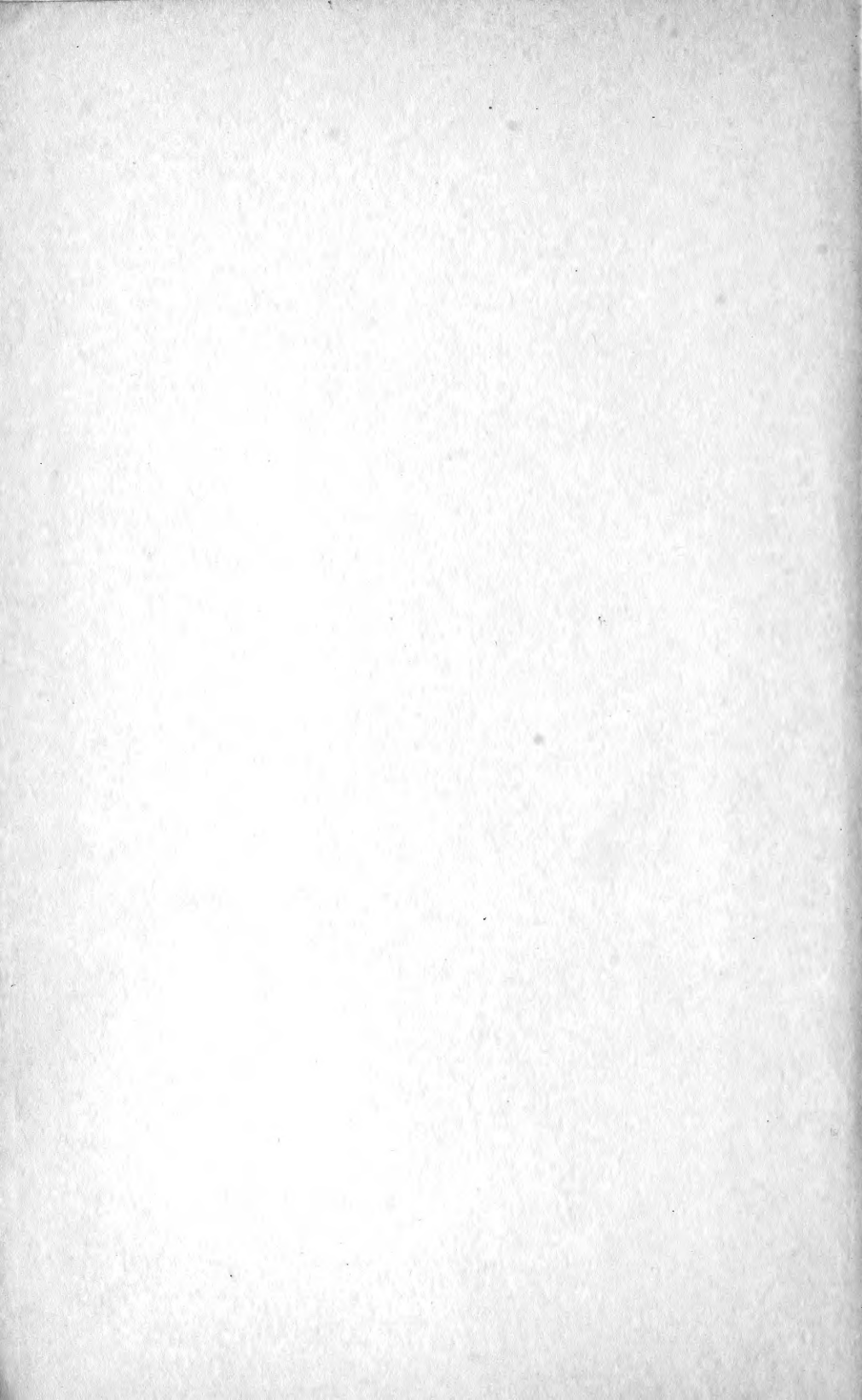
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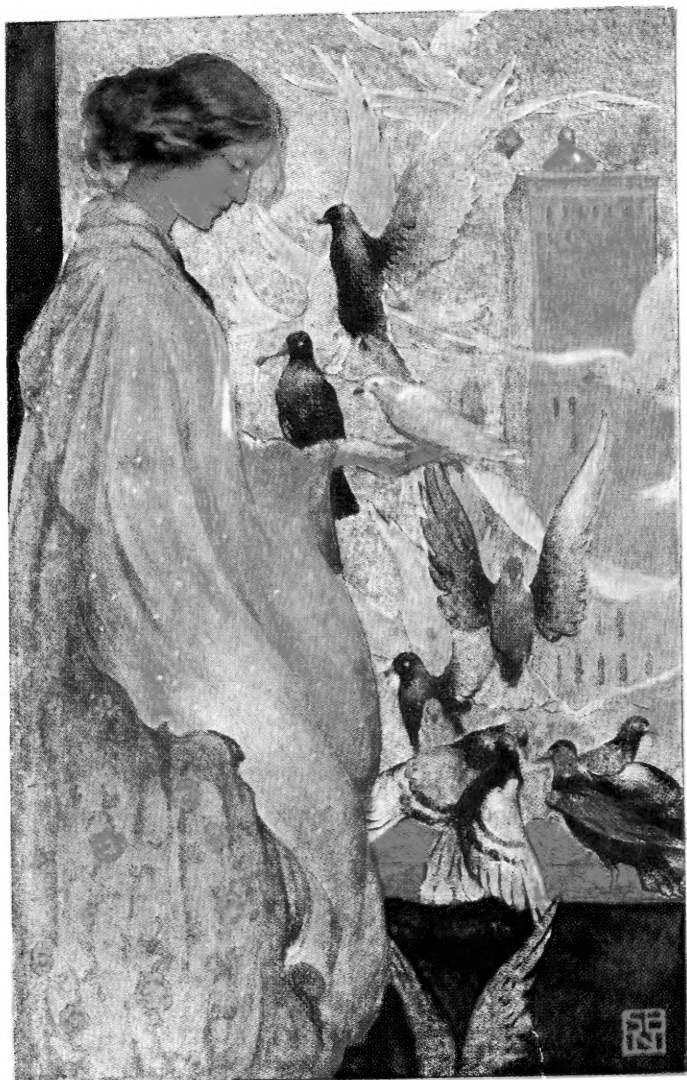
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AT MY WINDOW





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HOURS WITH MY
PIGEONS

BY
RUTH A. JOHNSTONE

With Frontispiece in Colors by
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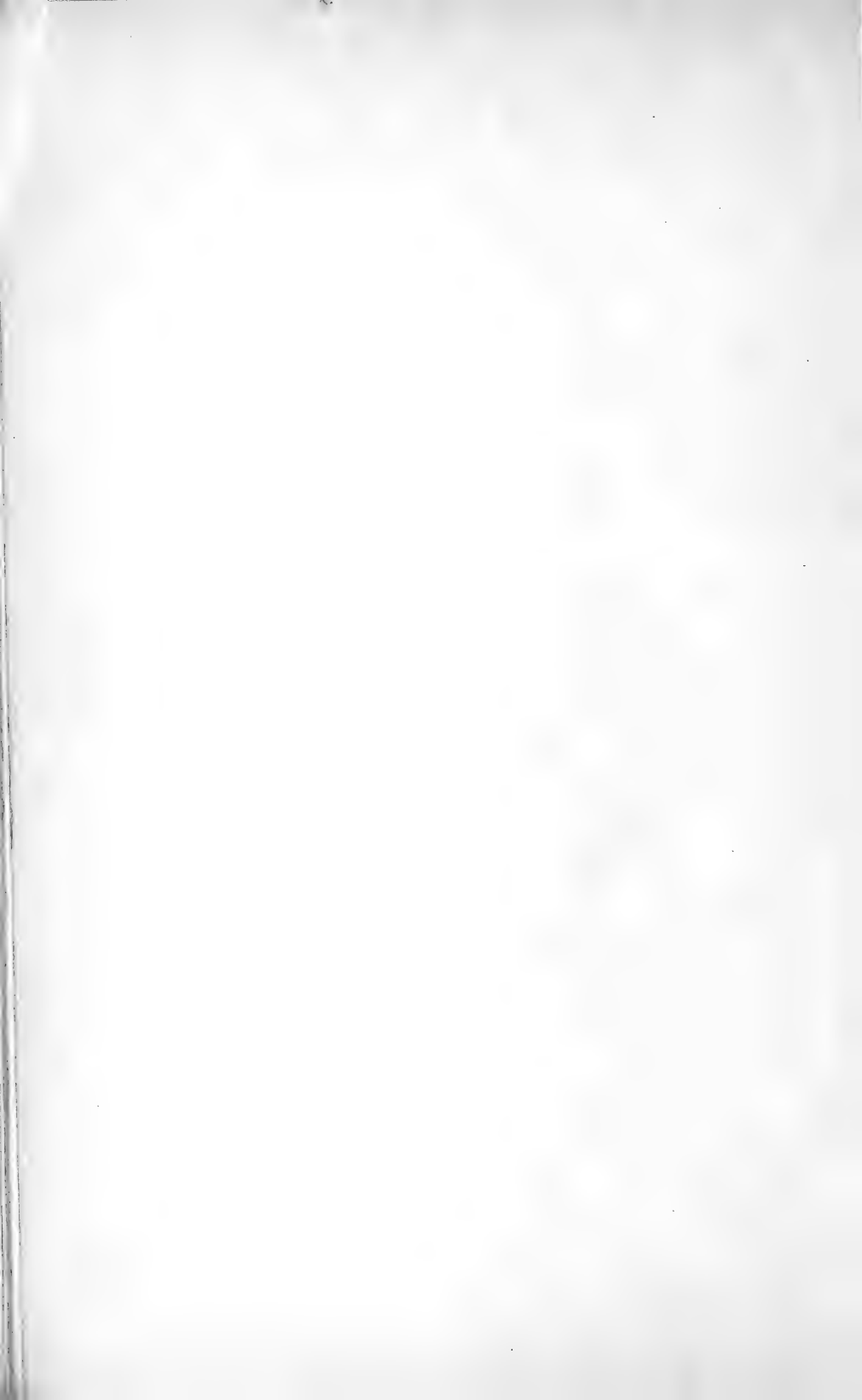
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 September, 1911

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TO
MY HUSBAND
ARTHUR JOHNSTONE, M.D.



PREFACE

The inspiration of this narrative was a conversation with Miss Josephine M. White, Children's Librarian, Riverside Branch, New York Public Library, who was much interested in some little incidents I related to her, and thought they would form an entertaining story.

She, also, is a lover of God's feathered creatures; and told me the pleasure she derived, each morning, in coming to the library, in gazing from the elevated train at a certain church tower, where a colony of pigeons make their home.

"They seem to understand where to go for refuge," was her tender way of expressing the impression they made upon her.

RUTH A. JOHNSTONE.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	VII
PRELUDE: REMINISCENCES	XI
I. A MOURNING DOVE.	1
II. A BRIDE AND GROOM AND "THE POINT- IES"	5
III. MY "TITIAN BLONDE"	8
IV. OTHER CHARACTERISTICS	12
V. "THE BUSTERS"	16
VI. NESTING	21
VII. A YOUNGER GENERATION	25
VIII. RIPENING FRIENDSHIP	29
IX. BATHING	35
X. BUILDING A NEST	41
XI. "BANDY"	46
XII. MOULTING. TEACHING THEM NOT TO FIGHT	52
XIII. "BUSTER" LEAVES HIS BABY IN MY CARE	57
XIV. A CARRIER-PIGEON AND SOME OTHERS .	64
XV. "JACK AND JILL" "THE BURGLAR" .	74
XVI. SHOT IN THE CORN FIELD	79
XVII. SOME PIGEON FEATS AND ANTICS .	86
XVIII. "KISSIE CORN" AND MUSIC	92
XIX. PIGEON LOVE AND CONFIDENCE	96
XX. PIGEON GRATITUDE AND TENDERNESS .	102
XXI. FINALE	112



PRELUDE

REMINISCENCES

WHEN I was a little girl, I often wondered at my dear mother's fondness for her pet canary, Dick, at whose cage she was wont to linger with caressing attentions. I used to look and marvel; for, although an ardent lover of pets, a bird, particularly one in a cage, never appealed to me, the suggestion of captivity implying to my mind unhappiness for the little caged one. My idea of a pet was something I could hug and play with—an attracted rather than a compulsory pet: one that would belong to me of its own volition, through affection.

I was devoted to our dog Trooper, who was about my own age, and was almost broken-hearted the morning he was found

dead in our garden, poisoned by burglars who had entered the adjoining house during the night. And I thought it a very solemn function when Trooper was buried near my favorite rose bush, and I am sure some tears were mingled with the rose leaves strewn over his grave.

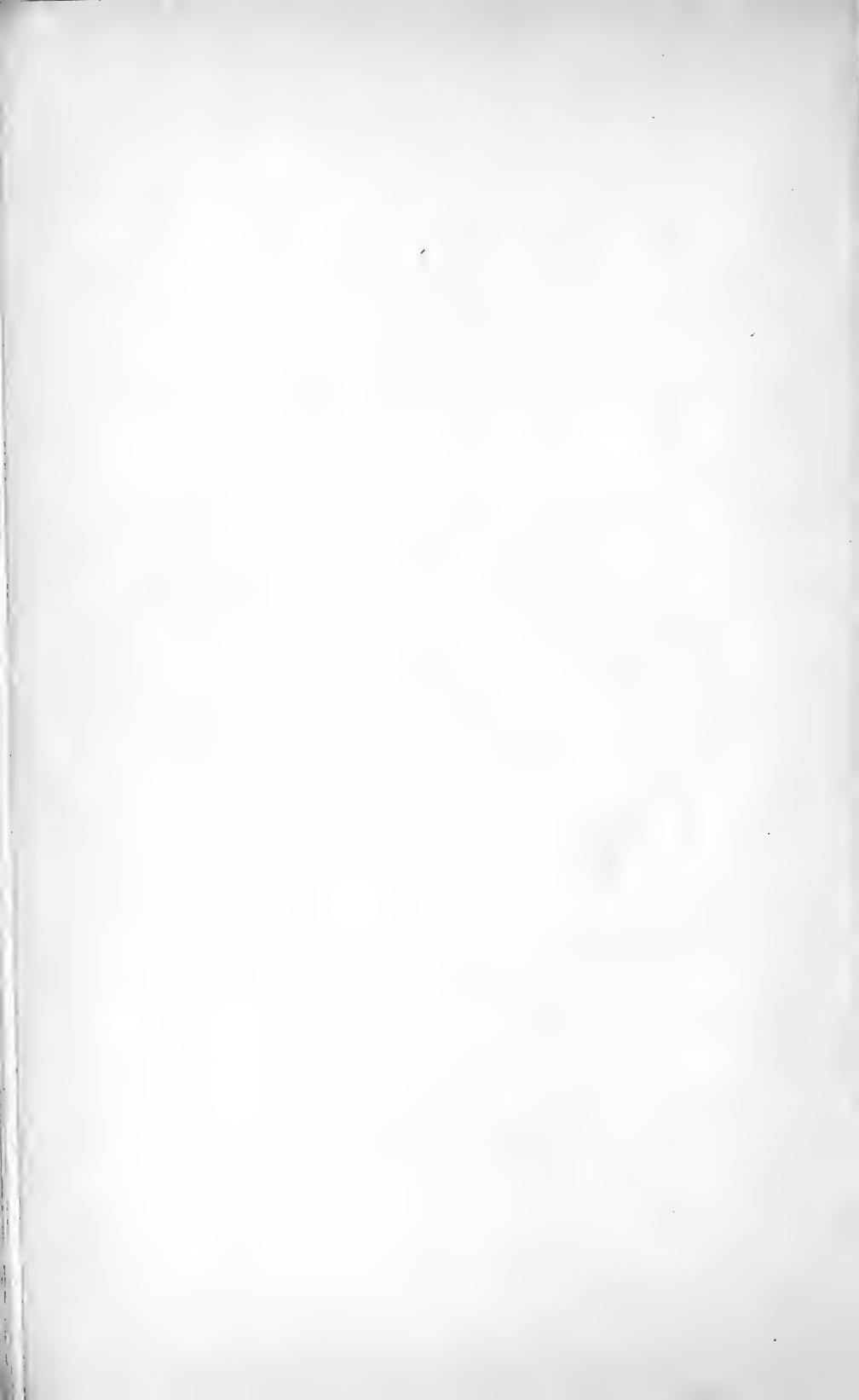
I also dearly loved our gray cat Queechy, and all her pretty kittens, and delighted in holding them all in my lap together, naming each after a flower. The white one was "Lily," the one with purple eyes "Pansy," and the blue-eyed one, "Blue-Bell." But I think my favorite was the little black one with white paws, which my mother called "Topsy," considering it an appropriate name, especially as she was reading "Uncle Tom's Cabin" at the time.

When I grew older, my beautiful black pony, Gipsy, had a large share of my affections; and when he had taken a lump of sugar from my hand and was happily munching it, it was my custom to place my

arms around his neck, and lean my face against his glossy head; an attention which he seemed to appreciate, as he would invariably, after receiving his sugar, bend his graceful head toward me for the expected caress.

About this time my music-master wished to present me with a beautiful canary, in approbation of my vocal improvement; but I declined the gift as politely as I could, explaining to him the aversion I always had to a caged pet, my conception of a bird being a picturesque adjunct to the branch of a tree.

And now, after a lapse of years, when I have been married a long time, my dearest pets are wild pigeons who have become tame at my window, having come to me of their own sweet wills, making themselves voluntary pets.



AT MY WINDOW

CHAPTER I

A MOURNING DOVE

I HAD long been attracted to the West Side of New York, and after residing on the East Side of the city a number of years, we moved to a high-storied hotel overlooking the magnificent Hudson River, taking a sunny corner apartment, high up above ordinary dwelling houses. We came in the early spring, and as our chosen apartment was not in readiness, we occupied an adjoining one for two weeks.

One morning we heard a soft and mournful cooing outside one of the large windows, and discovered a beautiful light gray pigeon, with wistful amber-colored eyes. He entertained us with his pathetic plaint and we offered him some crumbs, of which he par-

took, but with no apparent eagerness. Each day he came there, with his little mournful dirge, chanting, "Coo Coo-Coo!" and I fed him regularly, though he never seemed particularly hungry; giving the impression that he sought a haven of peaceful rest rather than material comfort.

One day it was very cold, although the almanac proclaimed we were mid-way in spring and even some snow-flakes intruded, nestling on the window which "Coo" had chosen for his abode. Wishing to make him comfortable, I arranged some excelsior for a nest, placing it in a sheltered nook of the large window-sill. But Coo eyed it with suspicion, keeping aloof from it. I also placed a low vase filled with water near his crumbs, but he declined to avail himself of it, preferring to fly into the bath-room window, and quench his thirst at the tank.

He was always alone—dear little Coo, and I afterwards learned he was probably a Carolina mourning dove.

When our apartment was ready we moved into it, wondering what would become of Coo, hoping our successors would be kind to him. But to our astonishment, the next day Coo was at one of the windows, chanting "Coo-Coo," in the sweet familiar way, and we welcomed him most cordially.

But our pretty Coo insisted upon coming indoors, although the weather was now soft and balmy. He liked to have us come close to him, but resented being touched; and our only method of requesting him to leave the room was pretending to take him in our hands, at which movement he would quickly fly out of the window.

I have had many pigeons at my window since the coming of Coo, and they all fly off about sunset, having each an especial roost for the night. Not so with Coo however, for when he had been at our window a few days, he insisted on coming in at sunset, and roosting on the tank in our bath-room. Early in the morning he would fly off for an outing,

leaving, I regret to say, the bath-room in a very inartistic condition. For although the droppings of a pigeon are odorless, they are certainly not ornamental; and I spent much time cleaning up after my pretty Coo.

We disliked turning him out, and I tried covering the bath-mat, tub, etc., with a sheet, but even this arrangement was not successful. As I could think of no expedient for preserving cleanliness while harboring Coo, it was finally decided that he must find a more suitable roost. As he still persisted in coming in, each evening, with great reluctance we placed a barrier in the shape of an ice-water pitcher on the centre of the bath-room window-sill, with the window partially closed.

Beautiful Coo resented this inhospitality, and left us forever.

CHAPTER II

A BRIDE AND GROOM, AND "THE POINTIES"

ONE bright, cold winter morning, Doctor called me to our sitting-room, to enjoy a pretty sight. On the broad sill of the southern window, two beautiful pigeons were sunning themselves, billing and cooing together. They appeared to be young pigeons who had, perhaps, recently mated. The male bird was jet black, with white chest looking like a shirt-front, and had yellow eyes. His mate was pure white, with large, black, lustrous eyes, and a pink beak. They were a beautiful pair and seemed enamored of each other. I named them the Bride and Groom, calling them individually, "Blackie" and "White Wings." We admired them through the closed window, for a time, and presently they flew away.

I was rather surprised to see them at the same window, the following day, and later another pair of young pigeons, probably newly mated, also appeared, sunning themselves happily together. The male bird was slate-colored, his distinguishing feature being a pointed beak, almost as fine as wire toward the end. The coloring around his neck was a beautiful blending of green and crimson, which many of the pigeons have. He carried his head haughtily and was altogether a very aristocratic bird. On account of his very pointed beak, I called him "Pointie," a name with which he was soon quite familiar, and to which he always responded.

His mate was smaller, and very daintily fashioned, of darker coloring, with unusually bright eyes meeting your gaze with a pretty surprised look. Her feathers were much the same in color as the majority of these wild pigeons, but I never could mistake her out of a dozen, on account of her bright eyes with

their expression of expectancy and surprise.

I spread crumbs along the window-sill, and both couples partook most eagerly, and have been coming daily ever since; a period of over three years, at the time of this writing.

I watched them at sunset, wishing to locate their roosts; and the Blackies flew across the square to a tall building, having their sleeping apartment under one of the eaves, about on a level with my sitting-room; and from my eastern window I could see them when taking their siesta, or sitting on their eggs. The Pointies had cosy quarters below my dressing room, and I was thus unable to see them after they entered the dove-cote.

CHAPTER III

MY "TITIAN BLONDE"

ONE day the Blackies flew over accompanied by a small reddish brown pigeon whom I called my Titian Blonde, naming her "Brownie." How I did learn to love that little brown pigeon, who used almost to talk to me with her expressive eyes and little movements peculiar to herself!

Another day she flew around with the Pointies, and the three ate their luncheon very happily together; after which they spread their wings, stretched themselves, and settled down for a sun-bath. But Pointie took it into his proudly lifted head that three were no company, so he walked over to Brownie and pecked her. My Titian Blonde resented this with a return peck, but after a sharp attack from Pointie's beak, my little

Brownie took the hint that she was not wanted, and flew away. The next day she came with the Blackies, and after a while she received the same discourteous treatment from them, and realizing that her presence was not appreciated, she departed.

Thus they came every day, my five pigeons, remaining most of the time. They would occasionally fly away for exercise, but shortly return. I had their meals always in readiness for them, and was never afraid of making them sick by over-feeding; for I understood that, although pigeons have very healthy appetites, they never over-eat. I later discovered, however, that this fact applied only to the older pigeons, and not to the squabs.

It also subsequently appeared that the pigeon appetite increased, for after a while they seemed willing to eat almost all day, which was not the case in the beginning. I soon learned, however, the explanation of the apparent development of their appetites. It

was on account of the squabs being nourished by the parent bird's receiving into its opened beak the tiny beak of the squab, thus feeding the little one with predigested food. Consequently the parent was again hungry and sought another meal, and still another, and another. But in the beginning of my friendship with the pigeons they were newly mated, and consequently had no little ones to nourish.

At that time, when their hunger was appeased, they would turn from their crumbs, and stretch, or rest, or preen themselves. The only occasion when they seemed tempted to eat too much was when pigeons other than their mates appeared. Then, I regret to say, they ate, apparently, for the sole purpose of depriving the other pigeons.

They have some admirable instincts: the one that endeared them to me being their fidelity to their mates, never seeming to waver in their constancy. I have heard of a pigeon pining away after the death of a mate, but so pathetic an incident has not

come under my notice. My pigeons mate again, and in some cases retain the old nests; in others, find new ones. From the latter fact I infer that the first mate may be lying dead on the old nest. After re-mating, they manifest the same fidelity and affection.

We humans, I think, might learn a lesson, if we would, from these little feathered creatures.

CHAPTER IV

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

BUT they also have their faults, and I soon discovered that their pugnacity toward pigeons other than their mates was surprising. I was also amazed at their apparent lack of affection for their young, discarding them at a tender age, insisting on their shifting for themselves soon after they had learned to fly. I was unable to reconcile this instinct with their loyalty to their mates, the eagerness with which they built their nests, and the fidelity to their eggs. I attributed it to a desire to teach the youngsters self-reliance.

However, I was much entertained each day by my five pigeons. On one occasion I remarked to Doctor upon a habit they had of flying away and quickly returning, and

was told that they probably sought a drink after the little dry crumbs. I thereupon placed an agate basin filled with water at one corner of the sill, attaching it to the awning hook. At first they eyed it askance, but presently overcoming their suspicion, they appeared to realize its object, and accepted it with much satisfaction. I then observed that, unlike most birds, pigeons keep their bills immersed until they have finished drinking.

It also attracted other pigeons, who availed themselves of the luxury of a nice clean drink, but were never allowed to remain on the window-sill by the ones in possession. They seemed to regard it as their "Piazza," where they were wont to strut and stretch, and preen their feathers, making themselves generally at home.

If the Pointies arrived first, they resented the arrival of the Blackies, and vice versa, each pair wishing to be alone together; quite unlike a bride and groom of whom I once

read, who selected an isolated place for passing the honeymoon, that their romance might not be disturbed. After a few days, the bride exclaimed, "Wouldn't it be lovely if some friend should appear!" and the groom, stifling a yawn, replied, "Yes, or even an enemy."

But the pigeon mates experience no *ennui* when alone together, invariably resenting the approach of others. At such times the male birds have a performance which they take very seriously. It is a certain little war dance which they execute by pirouetting, lifting one foot and then the other, twirling around to the right, then to the left, uttering at the same time a little guttural sound something like "Groo-groo-groo!" We soon learned that this meant a protest at any pigeon's invading their territory; and if the warning is not heeded, a lively pecking promptly ensues, and is maintained with much vigor.

To remedy this state of affairs, and pre-

serve peace and harmony on the Piazza, I sometimes placed a supply of crumbs at one end, and one at the other, calling the Blackies here, and the Pointies there. Then I would give my little Brownie some by herself. Each responding to my call, they would thus dine happily, the mates close together.

It would have been prettier to give them romantic names, such as Romeo and Juliet, Paul and Virginia, Hero and Leander, and so on; and I probably should have done so had I this narrative in mind. But at the time, I gave them merely nick-names by which to identify them, and as they were responsive, I made no change.

My maid was astonished at their intelligence in responding to their names, exclaiming, "Why, ma'am, they are just like Christians!" (meaning human beings).

And a voice from the morris chair laughingly added, "Yes, and they fight like Christians!" (meaning, I hope, human beings).

CHAPTER V.

“THE BUSTERS”

ONE afternoon, I abbreviated some pleasant calls, to hasten home to my pigeons. I had left a liberal supply of crumbs, and nice fresh water; but having become accustomed to see them daintily drink before flying off for the day, preferred not to miss the finale. I was a little late, however, for the sun was just descending over the Jersey hills, leaving a radiant reflection of crimson and gold over the shimmering Hudson, as I entered my apartment.

There were no pigeons on the Piazza, but as they sometimes loitered around the ledge, I leaned out, softly calling, “Coo-Coo-Coo,” as was my custom. My five pets had evidently retired for the night, but to my surprise a large, bluish-gray pigeon, with hair

arranged apparently à la pompadour, responded to my call.

Doctor, who had just entered the room, exclaimed, "Hello, Buster! where did you come from?" And since then we have called him "Buster," an appellation he clearly recognizes, though my maid refers to him as "the big blue pigeon."

We spread crumbs for him, and he seemed very appreciative; and when he had appeased his hunger, and taken a drink, he flew off to a high apartment-building about a block away, his roost facing one of our southern windows.

He came again the following day, and has come regularly ever since. He proved to be a domineering bird, as my pigeons soon discovered, endeavoring to monopolize the Piazza; and many pugilistic encounters were the result. One day I discovered him eating contentedly with a small, thin pigeon beside him. She was a forlorn looking little creature, this newcomer, and I assumed that

Buster tolerated her out of sheer pity. But presently he began showering caresses upon her, in the shape of gentle pecks around her head and eyes, which she returned; thus disclosing the fact that they were mates. And in the course of time they became very interesting, endearing themselves to me by their almost human characteristics. Dear old Buster, the kind father and faithful head of the family, and little Mrs. Buster, the devoted mate and energetic housekeeper. She soon developed into one of the prettiest pigeons on the Piazza, having become plump and glossy. Her coloring was much the same as Buster's, bluish-gray, like many of the pigeons. She was very slenderly built, though almost as tall as Buster, with eyes as red as carmine.

I soon discovered this fragile bird had a temper out of proportion to her little frame, and at first I was inclined to dislike her, calling her a "little vixen." Every day she attacked my Brownie, flapping her wings in

the little brown face, and pecking her. Buster, too, was most unchivalrous to my Titian Blonde, pirouetting before her, endeavoring to drive her away.

They were plainly jealous of her, thinking, probably, that I made too much of her, discriminating against them. When giving crumbs to the Busters, and calling Brownie to get hers, Buster would immediately leave his, to investigate what Brownie had. And, I must admit, he usually discovered something more dainty at Brownie's place: corn muffin crumbs, perhaps, or a little black grain that is to be found among oats, which I sometimes procured from the livery stable.

Brownie, however, was not afraid of Buster, and would stand her ground fearlessly; but Mrs. Buster's peck must have been sharper, for Brownie seemed actually terrorized when Mrs. Buster approached her with flashing eyes. And how those little red eyes could flash with anger, and how soft and gentle they became when she was alone

with Buster, whom she dearly loved! One day she made my Brownie's life so miserable that I tapped her head, reprovngly, and in caressing tones called Brownie to me, giving her a dainty. The Busters plainly understood that they were in disfavor; and when, a little later, Mrs. Buster again attacked my Brownie, even Buster seemed ashamed of her, and pirouetting in front of her gave her to understand that she must leave the Piazza, which she promptly did, he following.

CHAPTER VI

NESTING

LITTLE Brownie was wont to stay at the window most of the time. The Blackies, Pointies, and Busters would come and go; but Brownie was my most constant companion. We would sometimes spend a whole morning alone together. I would sit near the window—the Pigeons' Window we grew to call it—with my work-basket, or book, and Brownie and I would entertain each other. If reading, I would look up occasionally and speak to her, and she would respond by moving a little nearer. If engaged with my work I would sing to her, improvising words about a little brown pigeon whom I loved.

The crumbs were always spread for her, but it used to charm me to have her come

nearer and coax for the little black grain, which she seemed to understand was reserved for her. She was altogether a very engaging little pigeon, and I was so accustomed to seeing her alone that I was much surprised, one beautiful day in early spring, when she flew over accompanied by a dark pigeon considerably larger than herself.

I gave her crumbs, as usual, which she shared with her companion, who was most inhospitably greeted by the male birds already on the Piazza with their mates. Brownie stood beside him, endeavoring to shield him from his aggressors, and he succeeded in having a good meal despite the protesting "Groos" which were showered upon him. My little Brownie had mated, introducing to the Piazza her heart's choice; and from thenceforth the four couples strove each to own the place; the male birds being energetic fighters. To-day one would be the conqueror, to-morrow another, and so on; pugilistic honors being about evenly divided.

Shortly after this I noticed my Brownie, coming as of yore, alone, each morning, and I wondered if her mate had proved unworthy, and her little romance ended. I had scant courtesy for her partner when he came a little later, after Brownie had flown away, addressing him as "perfidious one!" and was almost tempted to let him go hungry. But observing that the other female pigeons came without their mates, and later the males appeared, I rightly inferred it was nesting time, and that the eggs were never abandoned; the female pigeons covering them in the afternoon, the males in the forenoon.

Thus it was that every morning Mrs. Pointie, Mrs. Buster, White Wings, and Brownie were wont to visit the Piazza, spending most of their time there, eating, drinking, arranging their toilets, and indulging in the luxury of *dolce far niente*. They diversified the time by occasionally pecking each other, but their quarrels were not of a serious nature. In some mysterious way,

they always knew when their time of recreation was over, and one after another would fly away.

Shortly, a male pigeon would appear, very hungry, very thirsty, and apparently tired. Then another would come, and another, and another. It was pretty to see them stretch themselves: their wings, one leg, then the other, then the neck from side to side. They gave the impression of having been in a cramped position for a considerable time, and appreciative of the relaxation.

I missed very much seeing my pretty mates together, a pleasure I was obliged to forego for about three weeks.

CHAPTER VII

A YOUNGER GENERATION

CAN you look up from your desk a moment," I asked, "and tell me if you have any difficulty in guessing whose progeny this is at the window?"

"Perhaps it is a little Brownie," came the laughing reply.

But it was not a little Brownie. There, about mid-way on the Piazza stood a beautiful young pigeon, jet black, with a white dickey, and fearless dark eyes; a perfect replica in miniature of the one I had named the "Bridegroom," a few months previously. He was a scary little fellow, and quickly flew away on being noticed.

Except for his being the counterpart of Blackie, one would never suppose they were related; for the first time I saw them at the

window together, it might be inferred they were bitter enemies.

Blackie pirouetted in front of him, and White Wings gave him a peck. They were evidently saying to him, "Go off and hustle for yourself!" He uttered a protesting little sound like "Wee-wee!" but was soon driven off.

It was therefore very ludicrous, not long after, when little "Wee-Wee," while enjoying his dinner on the Piazza, glanced up at the fluttering of approaching wings, and as his parents alighted with their accustomed confidence, pranced in front of them, twirling around, uttering a little attempt at "Groo-groo-groo!" like the older pigeons. Blackie for a moment stood amazed at the impudence of this youngster, and then advanced upon him. Wee-Wee stood his ground an instant, bravely facing his forebear, little white chest distended, but was presently driven off; not, however, until he had inflicted an unfilial peck upon his mother, equivalent to "Take that!"

About this time the Busters came flying over, very slowly, between them a young pigeon, whom they were evidently teaching to fly. When they alighted on the Piazza I noticed that the squab resembled Buster, but had a long beak like her mother. The three ate together very happily, and Buster, in playful mood, bestowed some make-believe pecks upon, or rather at, his offspring.

After a while Mrs. Buster fluttered her wings in intimation of flight and the three departed, the squab between her parents. It was a perfect little poem in pigeon movement, with the slow rhythmic movement of the six wings, rising and falling in unison, so different from the Busters' usual hasty flight.

But I regret to record it was the only time I enjoyed the scene of the happy family; for when next I saw them on the Piazza together, Miss Buster was receiving the same ungracious treatment from her parents that had previously been accorded little Wee-Wee.

Miss Buster, however, mated very early with a young pigeon having a markedly pointed beak, who, I inferred, was a young Pointie; and I now call her Mrs. Pointie Junior, *née* Buster. The young Pointies soon became the proud possessors of a little squab of their own, thus making the Busters and Pointies grandparents, which seemed almost incredible, especially when one regarded Mrs. Pointie, so small and dainty, looking more like a *débutante* than like a matron and grand-mamma.

CHAPTER VIII

RIPENING FRIENDSHIP

MY pigeons and I had now been warm friends through a long, bleak winter. Our friendship was not a sudden impulse, but an attraction of very gradual development. In other words, they did not become tame immediately on acquaintance, but day by day, when I had proven myself a genuine friend.

At first they would take the crumbs only after I had closed the window and withdrawn a little; but later, they resented the window's being down, and I have taken several colds in deference to their wishes. Still later, the tamer ones, notably the Busters and "Bandy," who has not yet been introduced, did not hesitate to come into the room look-

ing for the crumb-box. Finally, they fought for the privilege of eating out of my hand. I hasten to explain that my hand always contained the choicest portion of the menu.

I was sitting about mid-way in our sitting-room, my work-basket beside me on the table, intent on my work. I did not notice that the crumbs on the sill had vanished down little throats until my attention was called to the fact by hearing a fluttering of wings and seeing my big blue pigeon near the centre of the table, looking very excited and much disconcerted at having disturbed a bowl of roses, but very intent on a certain green box. "Why Buster!" I exclaimed, "have I neglected you?" Whereupon he flew back to the window, but with an air of expectancy, craning his neck, peering into the room.

I promptly responded to his quest, which was only the first of many subsequent ones. Later, when I wished to play with him, I placed the box in different parts of the room, and let him search for it, Mrs. Buster of

course following suit, her greatest happiness to be near Buster, her motto: "Whither thou goest, I go."

Joining Doctor in the dining-room one morning, I said, "Did you leave any valuables around upstairs? The Busters are looking eagerly in the window and may treasure a souvenir." For the pigeons were much attracted to bright articles, and often made strenuous efforts to take a ring from my finger, or an ornament from my gown.

In the beginning, however, there were some unpremeditated entrances to the room which were not appreciated at either side of the window. The first was Pointie, who was standing on the inner part of the sill when some sudden outside noise startled all the pigeons, and the wings were hastily spread in flight. Pointie, in a great flutter of excitement, flew across the room, and mistaking the large plate glass window for an open casement, dashed against it with great force, terrifying both himself and me.

“Pointie! Pointie!” I called softly to reassure him; but the poor little fellow was too much frightened to heed me. He flew around the room wildly, till finally, to my great relief, he located the Pigeons’ Window, and was out in the open air. It was probably a week or more before his confidence was sufficiently restored to let him come nearer than the outer ledge of the window.

On another occasion when the Busters had become quite tame, and my big blue pigeon had flown into the room toward the box of crumbs, which I had left uncovered on the floor, White-Wings craned her pretty neck, looked in, and seemed to think it very attractive inside. Blackie and the others were on the Piazza enjoying themselves as usual, and each head was lifted in surprise as the white wings fluttered and Mrs. Blackie alighted on the floor beside Buster, who was busily engaged with the crumb-box. Blackie came forward, gazing intently for a moment at his mate eating contentedly with Buster, and, contrary to my expectation that he

would enter also, turned around and flew over to his roost.

Mrs. Blackie's meal, however, was of short duration; for a book, slipping from my lap, startled both her and Buster, the latter flying quickly out the window, simultaneously with Whitie's upward flight across the room. She made the same mishap previously made by Pointie, mistaking the large eastern window for an open space, dashing against it with great force. The impact threw the little white form to the floor, and for a moment I had a great fear.

But she presently lifted her head, looking around as if dazed, and then flew upward, alighting on the back of a chair, where she remained a few moments, seemingly content. I drew the blind down to prevent her repeating her mistake, and spoke caressingly to her. She gazed across the room at the pigeons on the window-sill, but made no attempt to join them, resting on her perch as if taking her bearings, or recovering from her hurt. She remained in the room a while, and then

flew out on the Piazza, resting in the sunshine for a moment before flying over to her roost.

But poor little White-Wings received no welcome home, for to my amazement, Blackie, who was at the entrance of the dove-cote, apparently awaiting her return, pirouetted in front of her as she alighted, and would not allow her to enter the little home. He evidently resented her long absence; and having last seen her at the crumb-box with Buster, some jealous thought may have entered his glossy head. Perhaps he fancied his pretty mate had cast an approving glance at Buster's pompadour, or that Buster was enamored of her lustrous eyes. But I, who chaperoned the whole affair, could have satisfied him that his suspicions were unjustified, that the glances of admiration were centered entirely on the crumb-box.

I heartily sympathized with little White-Wings, and was relieved, the next morning, to see them flying over together, as usual. It gratified me to know that the matrimonial tangle was happily unraveled.

CHAPTER IX

BATHING

DURING the cold winter days, I was frequently obliged to take the agate basin into the bath-room, remove the ice, and refill it. But at the time of which I am now writing—the later spring and early summer, the time of my first acquaintance with the younger generation—I used generally to wash the basin in the morning, fill it, and merely replenish it during the day. But I soon discovered that more was expected of me.

Buster was taking a long slow drink, encouraged by a kindly voice from the morris chair, “Drink hearty” and on turning to the window a moment later I discovered him in the center of the basin.

“Dear old Buster” I exclaimed, “did you slip in? Are you frightened?”

But my big blue pigeon repudiated any imputation on his valor by promptly dipping under, illustrating for my delight what a pretty sight it is to see a pigeon bathe; the wings outspread, the body immersed, dipping down at one side, then the other, each pretty movement seemingly more attractive than the one before. But I was surprised to notice that they never dip the head under.

Presently Mrs. Buster approached the basin, fluffing up her head feathers, which, I soon learned, is the first indication of a desire to take a plunge. She first “teased” the water with her beak, the pigeon way of washing it, and then tried to edge herself into the basin, which was scarcely large enough to allow two to bathe comfortably. I thereupon resolved to place a larger basin out, but the pleasure I derived from seeing the mates crowd in together influenced me in letting the smaller basin remain.

During the first bathing episode, Buster placed himself in the very center of the bowl, appearing hugely content; but finally Mrs. Buster edged her slender form into the water, and they reminded me of two little ducks, as they sat facing each other. When they were thoroughly wet, and had enjoyed the bath sufficiently, they emerged from the basin, flapping their wings vigorously, scattering water drops here and there, with entire lack of consideration for their neighbors who were resting in the sunshine.

The two dripping birds were a funny sight, and wholly unrecognizable as they seated themselves closely together on the outer ledge, receiving the full benefit of the sun, having left a very dirty basin of water, which I promptly changed, before any of the pigeons should quench their thirst. But I very soon learned that my pretty pigeons were not at all fastidious regarding their drinking water.

It frequently happens that while one or two

are bathing, another, or perhaps several, insist on taking a drink. Then a very lively pecking ensues between the bathers and the thirsty ones. Consequently I am often kept very busy changing the water, being more particular than they as regards the purity of their drink.

The Blackies' bathing together amuses me very much. And in this, as in other things, the pigeon disposition is manifested, no two being quite alike. White-Wings always seems to expect a great deal of attention from her mate, accepting caresses but giving few in return. She impresses me as a trifle egotistical. Blackie's fluffing up his head feathers and washing his beak, the preliminary of a bath, is the signal for her to hasten into the basin, occupying the very center, low down in the water, leaving no room for Blackie. On crowding into the basin he spreads one wing over her, which seems to please her very much; and nothing can be seen of her but large black lustrous eyes, peering from under Blackie's wing.

The squabs are very fond of bathing, and sometimes indulge in what we call a "consolation bath"; which means when one is repulsed by the older pigeons, and pushed aside during meals after many unsuccessful attempts to hold his own, he finally plunges into the basin, as if to say, "Well, if you won't let me eat, at least I may take a bath!" It seems a part of pigeon ethics that squabs must be kept in subjection by the older pigeons. They are usually irrepresible in taking the most desirable places on the Piazza, without regard to their elders; and the latter have a system of "hazing," or teaching them manners. The little ones receive pecks from every side, usually accepting them as a matter of course, merely uttering a protesting little "Squeak, squeak!"

I am very fond of the squabs, and find them particularly interesting. I love to note their ancestry, for they are usually sent adrift at an early age. The squab will run to its parent, flapping its wings, crying "Wee-wee!" which is probably the nest-cry

for food, raising its little beak for recognition. But the parent bird in most cases turns coldly away, ignoring the repeated pleadings of its offspring.

At first I was shocked at this, and disappointed in my pigeons, who had become dear to me; but reflecting on pigeon nature and pigeon life, as revealed to me by daily observation, I came to the conclusion that this casting aside of their young was a necessary condition of their lives, which seemed to run in a circle of mating, nesting, covering the egg, rearing the squab for about two weeks, and then taking a little vacation together. Each duty was performed earnestly and as conscientiously as it would have been among us humans, in our endeavor to form character, and in our aspirations to attain the higher life; in our strivings to make each day better and more acceptable than the one before, realizing that each temptation conquered strengthens character.

These little feathered creatures take their destinies very seriously.

CHAPTER X

BUILDING A NEST

ABOUT the time Miss Buster and young Pointie formed an alliance, the latter appeared at the window, one morning, bearing a sheaf of straw in his beak. Very manly and gallant he appeared, alighting before me as I sat in the mellow sunshine, and cast his wisp of straw before me. He immediately flew away, returning presently and repeating his pretty performance. I thought to myself, "I believe this little fellow is presenting me with a bouquet in appreciation of my attention to feeding him."

It later dawned upon me that perhaps he had foolishly selected the Piazza as the site for the dove-cote; but I was unable to construe his motive, as Mrs. Buster, alighting

on the window-sill, took possession of a straw and flew quickly away, over to her nest. When she returned, the other straw had been borne away by the summer breeze.

She seemed restless and disinclined to eat, and when I left the window I noticed her pulling at the awning cord. When I came near her, she left it and flew to another window. I was curious to know what scheme was in the little feathered head, and going into the adjoining room discovered her at the window with the awning cord in her tiny beak. Espying me, she dropped it, and flew back to the Pigeons' Window. After watching her for some time, I concluded that she wanted the awning cord, but thought I would not permit her to have it. In plain English, she was trying to steal it.

As I pretended not to notice her, she took the end firmly in her beak and flew off, and was much disappointed at her inability to proceed. I thereupon cut a piece from the end, and placed it on the window-sill. She

promptly appropriated it, bearing it over to her nest.

It then became apparent to me that she was repairing her old nest or building a new one, and I determined to help her. I cut several pieces of different lengths from a ball of thick twine, placing them on the window-sill. She soon returned and, picking up one piece after another, finally decided on the longest one, which she carried away with her. I thus learned that her preference was for a half-yard length, and I busied myself for an hour cutting the desired lengths for her. Taking one end in her beak, she would shake it from side to side as if testing it, and then quickly fly across with it. She looked like a tiny kite with a long tail, as she made her journey over the housetops.

Buster, undoubtedly, was in the nest, receiving and arranging the material; for she simply took time to deposit it, when she was over for more. After a while the industrious little housewife became tired; her little throat

throbbing and her beak open as if panting, a condition with all the pigeons after flying about in very warm weather. She would thus sometimes drop the cord when about half way over, quickly returning to me for another piece. I coaxed her with dainty crumbs to rest a while, but she was too intent on her work to care for food and drink.

The next day, I spent several hours assisting her. I had procured straws and thick twine, and we worked together for a long time. To make her task easier, I held each straw and each piece of twine for her, she receiving them gratefully from my hand. She worked energetically the greater portion of two warm days, devoting but a few minutes to food and drink. Her mate exercised considerable forethought on the several occasions when he came over for his meals, always carrying a straw back with him.

From my experience with Mrs. Buster, I concluded that the female pigeons gathered

the material, the male birds forming the nest. But I soon discovered that in some cases the male birds collected the straws, etc., and in other cases they did so alternately.

The dear little creatures seemed very appreciative of my constant efforts to assist them.

CHAPTER XI

“BANDY”

I SHALL now introduce “Bandy,” whom I learned to love, although at first I was prejudiced against him by reason of his attitude toward my eight pets. His roost was about three blocks away, in a high tower, and I know not what attracted him to my pigeons’ Piazza; but he appeared there one day, very self-assertive, and equally unwelcome. He seemed well versed in the art of self-defense, and promptly made his presence *felt*.

His appearance was not attractive, as he had large, thick rims around his eyes, which my maid called “automobile-goggles,” and a thickness across his large beak, with the appearance of a bandage. Owing to this, I called him “Bandage,” but later when I

came to know and love him I softened it to “Bandy.”

The resentment manifested at his invading the Piazza evoked from him much aggressiveness; and the more I and my pigeons endeavored to prevent him, the more persistent he was in remaining. But two never attacked him at the same time; such a course apparently being contrary to pigeon ethics. Even if a female pigeon is being molested, the mate does not interfere; but when the little combat is over, will, in many cases, punish the offender. Also, the female pigeon, if her mate is waging battle with another, will stand aside, but at the end will bestow a malicious peck upon her mate's antagonist.

At the time of Bandy's appearance, I had supplemented the daily menu of crumbs with delightful pigeon food. How they did relish it! and it certainly did look fascinating!—the varied grains all mingled together—red, green, tan, little green discs, and fresh

yellow corn. When I first procured it, it had reminded me of the delight I often experienced when a child, on opening a box of mixed candy, admiring the assortment. I believe my pigeons felt somewhat as I did, for they became almost wild with enthusiasm to possess my hand, and emulated a football team in their endeavors. Frequently now, when I offer them crumbs, they refuse them, pecking my fingers for pigeon-food; for, like human beings, in this as in many other things, they are unwilling to return to plain fare after acquiring a taste for luxuries. And the different pecks reveal their little dispositions: some peck roughly, demandingly; others timidly, with eyes uplifted pleadingly. Others again, the special pets, peck gently, but coaxingly, with full assurance of a favorable response.

Bandy evidently appreciated the pigeon food, together with the nice fresh water, and thought a place on the Piazza well worth fighting for. One day when he came there

during the absence of the other pigeons, I ventured to become acquainted with him, calling him to me. He eyed me askance for a moment, so unaccustomed was he to my addressing him in a caressing tone, but presently advanced with a softening light in his eye. I fed him and talked to him, and from that day his whole attitude changed. He had previously seemed to think he was discriminated against, which aroused his pigeon ire. But after the day we became friends, his whole demeanor changed, and he ceased to attack my pigeons, merely coming close to me, waiting to be fed.

He proved a wonderfully intelligent bird, so grave and wise that we called him the sage of the Piazza. He very soon introduced his mate to our little circle; a small dainty bronze pigeon, having, the first time I saw her, a string around one little leg, which was lame, as if hurt when liberating herself; for she had evidently been a captive.

Shortly after this, Bandy made it appar-

ent that he was interested in nest-building. He too began pulling at the awning cord, and I promptly supplied him with straws and twine. He had no hesitation in receiving the material from my hand, to the dissatisfaction of the other pigeons, who resented his engaging so much attention. They all seemed to fear a peck from Bandy's strong beak, and it was amusing to see them peck him, immediately after he received a straw from me, when his beak was occupied holding it. But Bandy never lost his self-possession by dropping his straw to retaliate; but with great dignity and self-control ignored the attack, swiftly making his homeward journey; with, however, a significant gleam in his eye which might be construed, "I'll see you later!"

After a while Bandy came to the Piazza at one part of the day, his mate another, thus disclosing the fact that an egg was being protected. But to my consternation, Bandy came over one afternoon with a beau-

tiful little round white egg adhering to his breast feathers. It evidently was an unhappy accident, occurring through his leaving the nest hastily. He seemed unaware of the situation, though apparently very uncomfortable and restless, remaining but a few moments, the egg still adhering to the feathers as he flew to his nest. I earnestly hoped he would reach there without damage to the egg, but realized such was not the happy sequel, when the following morning the mates appeared together.

Some months later, however, they were more successful with their egg; for one day, when I was feeding a tiny brown stranger, Bandy and some others alighted on the Piazza, and the little one, joyously flapping her wings, hastened to Bandy with upraised beak, chirping: “Wee-wee-wee!” Bandy took the little beak in his for an instant, signifying a caress, which evidently satisfied “Weeny,” who returned to her crumbs.

CHAPTER XII

MOULTING—TEACHING THEM NOT TO FIGHT

MARY, my kind-hearted chamber-maid, was often amazed at the perfect understanding existing between me and my pigeons; and to justify my devotion to them I said to her, "The reason I am so fond of the pigeons, Mary, is on account of their affection for each other; the mates are very faithful and devoted."

Mary threw up her hands in astonishment, exclaiming, "Oh, ma'am! do they know each other? I didn't think birds knew each other!"

She promised to take good care of them during my summer sojourn in the country. I returned to find my pigeons beginning their autumn moulting; and very curious and unlovely they appeared. Some of them were

scarcely recognizable, their poor little heads and throats almost bare. They also seem quite ill during moulting-time, and are devoid of their accustomed vivacity.

There was a pretty little scene enacted one morning by Mrs. Buster, who had been the first to moult, and now had recovered her feathers, looking more beautiful and glossy than heretofore. Buster, at this time, was quite ill, looking the skeleton of himself, and this morning was anxious for a bath. He placed himself in the basin, but was much annoyed by the other pigeons striving to displace him and pecking him from every side. Buster seemed to lack sufficient energy to defend himself; but a pair of little red eyes flashed indignantly as Mrs. Buster mounted the side of the basin, to protect her beloved mate from his tormentors, which she did most successfully, flapping her wings from side to side, pecking every head within reach. The little creature fought so valiantly that she soon had driven them all away. Then she

turned her attention to Buster, gently pecking him all over, as if massaging him, to his evident comfort and enjoyment.

After the autumn moulting, the pigeons assumed a beautiful appearance in their new and glossy coats of feathers, and regained their accustomed vigor, renewing their pugilistic encounters.

When they and I had been friends but a short time, I had ventured to instruct them that they must not fight, and was in a measure successful. But it evoked other qualities which I disliked even more than fighting. They became deceitful or sullen, according to their respective natures.

My method was to clap my hands over their heads, and, if necessary, gently separate them. Then I would admonish the aggressive pigeon—the one who made the attack—and call the other to me and feed him. They understood every tone of voice, and knew when they were in disfavor, or when encouraged. They soon had a perfect un-

derstanding that I disapproved of fighting, and that the penalty was my displeasure. This occurred at the time when I had only my eight pigeons. Since then I have undertaken the welfare of their children, and their children's children, till the numbers have become embarrassing.

However, my eight pigeons soon learned that the one who molested his neighbor was in disgrace; but that fact caused them merely to conceal their naughty tempers, not to curb them. In my presence, they would eat in apparent harmony, after which they would meet each other at the side of the window, showing their animosity when I could only see them by leaning out.

Buster, particularly, became sullen and ill-tempered. If he was on the Piazza first, and one of the others appeared, instead of pirouetting and "scolding," as formerly, he would leave his crumbs, walk to the end of the window-sill and sit down, eying the newcomer with displeasure. He would sit there

patiently and sullenly until the other bird flew away, when he quickly pursued him and vented his feelings.

Congratulating myself that I had taught my pigeons not to fight, I was told that I was making them unhappy, as that was part of their lives. And realizing that candid fighting was more honorable, or at least less to be blamed than duplicity and deceit, I very soon desisted in my efforts to improve my pigeons. And now, I am sorry to say, I witness daily the pulling of feathers, and often remove small ones from little beaks, lest they be swallowed.

And I spend considerable time guarding the weaker ones; for my pigeons have no sense of fair play or justice. I regret to say that with them possession is law, might is right, the result being the supremacy of the strongest.

CHAPTER XIII

“BUSTER” LEAVES HIS BABY IN MY CARE

I LOVE this pathetic little episode, though it saddens me, and I wish I could describe it as it really occurred.

Buster came over one afternoon, during the second winter of my friendship with the pigeons, accompanied by a tiny squab not much larger than a fat sparrow. I did not witness the approach, and cannot imagine how so small and young a pigeon could fly the distance from the Buster roost to the Piazza. But it had been accomplished, for there they were, happy together. Buster was teaching the little one to eat crumbs, pecking him if he attempted to swallow a large one, the baby crying “Wee-wee!” when admonished by its parent.

After a while, several hungry pigeons

came, pushing and crowding each other in their eagerness. Little "Bi-Bi," as I named him, was on the edge of the window-sill, and in the crowding of the pigeons was pushed off, and disappeared.

Buster, trembling from head to foot, flew downward, presently appearing on the roof of the house opposite, peering intently across. He then flew down a story, still peering across a little lower; and then up to my window, still trembling. He gazed into the sitting room in every nook and corner, from floor to ceiling.

"He is not here, Buster," I told him, and as if he understood me, he hastily flew away, over to his roost, but instantly returned, again peering into the room, and then away again.

The afternoon was waning, the sun had set, the pigeons had all gone to roost. Buster had been searching for almost an hour, when, to my great relief, just before dark, he and Bi-Bi appeared on the Piazza, the

little one apparently uninjured. They ate together for a moment, and then, by some understanding between them, they walked to a little nook at the side of the window, and Bi-Bi snuggled down. Buster stood over him, tenderly pecking him from head to foot, until Bi-Bi, closing his eyes, contentedly fell asleep. Then Buster made a hasty flight over to his nest.

Early the next morning, I went to look for Bi-Bi. The morning was very cold, and as I entered the sitting-room, I discovered Buster and Bi-Bi cuddled close together in a sheltered corner of the Piazza. Buster had evidently come over to look after him, and had taken him to the Piazza expecting that I would presently come to distribute crumbs. I spread a repast for them, and as soon as Bi-Bi became interested in the tiny crumbs in my hand, Buster flew over to his roost heedless of the plaintive “Wee-wee-wee!” of the abandoned squab.

We wondered what was Buster’s scheme

in leaving his little pigeon at our window and concluded that his nest was probably crowded by having two squabs, as frequently happens. He must have thought it all out, coming to the conclusion that his little one would be perfectly safe in my care, would be well fed and tenderly treated.

However, for three days he repeated his parental performance of remaining with Bi-Bi until dusk, and when all the pigeons had flown homeward for the night, he and Bi-Bi would take their little walk of about two feet to the nook, just at the side of the window, and Buster would "massage" the little feathers, and then hasten to his nest.

The snow fell heavily one afternoon, drifting into Bi-Bi's roost, and I encouraged him to spend the time near me, keeping the window open that I might protect him from the older pigeons, who objected to his receiving too much attention. Buster came over before sunset, remaining with Bi-Bi until the others departed; then, by some mysterious understanding, or pre-arrangement,

Buster pecked Bi-Bi, who was falling asleep, and the two flew over to the Buster roost. The next morning they returned together, and I received Bi-Bi in one hand, feeding him from the other; and Buster, apparently satisfied, hastened back to the nest.

After that, Buster seemed to think his little one able to care for himself, paying no further attention to him, except for occasionally pecking him when he remained too long eating from my hand. I did not, unfortunately, comprehend, until later, that Buster understood better than I the eating capacity of a young squab. Having noticed that the older birds never ate too much, I supposed the same applied to a squab, and learned, too late, that I had over-fed little Bi-Bi.

I was wont to sit at the window, the crumb-box beside me, and a smaller one, containing pigeon food, in my lap, dispensing to the little eager upraised beaks. But Bi-Bi had a fashion of jumping on my lap, and into the box, where I would permit him to feast

undisturbed. One day after this feasting, he sought the basin for a drink, thereby causing an indigestion from which he never recovered.

Previous to this, every evening at sunset he would seek his little roost at the window-side, and before closing the window for the night, we would look out and speak to him—the poor, lonely little fellow, and say, “Good-night, Bi-Bi!”

He would open his little eyes, blink his response, and then go off to sleep, as we closed the window noiselessly.

But when he became ill, he seemed chilly all the time, constantly shivering; and instead of flying off for exercise, would come into the room for a while, as if for warmth, but would seek his roost at sunset.

One very cold night I left the window partially open from the bottom, in case he should wish to come in; hardly expecting, however, that he would accept the implied invitation; for I had always understood that birds never left the roost until daylight.

But contrary to my supposition, in the blackness of the night little Bi-Bi made his way to the window, and into the darkened room; for on turning on an electric light, I discovered the pathetic little figure on the floor, just inside the window. I turned the heat on, and spoke endearingly to him, before leaving the room.

In the morning I found he had walked to the radiator, grateful for the warmth, but was evidently suffering from acute indigestion, his little breast heaving as he gasped for breath. I took him into my hand, and the poor little sufferer presently vomited two tiny pieces of corn I had fed him the previous afternoon.

He seemed so ill and cold that I arranged a little nest for him on a tabouret near the window; but on account of the pigeons' disturbing him, or for some little reason of his own, he preferred to remain on the floor; and I made him as comfortable as possible, during the short span of his little life.

CHAPTER XIV

A CARRIER-PIGEON AND SOME OTHERS

TO my mind there is always something poetical about a carrier-pigeon, but the beautiful one that came to our window one cold, raw day at the close of winter was very material, being hungry, thirsty, and cold. We treated him with marked hospitality, but, as he was not tame like our own pigeons, we were unable to decipher the number on the silver band around his leg. Later, when he became quite tame, and chose a mate at the Piazza, the band had become so tarnished that the legend was obliterated.

In the early spring our little home experienced a critical illness and long convalescence; the latter affording ample opportu-

nity for the interesting study of pigeon nature.

An attractive generation appeared about this time, and although we learned nothing new about pigeon ethics, nothing we had not already gleaned, we were nevertheless much entertained by the bevy of youngsters, who, seeing their parents tame, became even more so themselves.

Bandy's squab, Weeny, developed into a most lovable little pigeon, as tame as a pet kitten. She delighted in perching on my shoulder while I sat at the window feeding the pigeons, and when, turning my head to speak to her, I would ask, "Do I love my little Weeny?" she would stretch her neck, placing her tiny beak close to my lips. She was a confiding little creature, loving to be petted, utterly without fear or distrust of Doctor or me, but allowing no one else to touch her.

Then there was "Pugie," named after his parent "Pugilist," who was much addicted to

fighting, and had thus received the unlovely name. He was not handsome, our little Pugie, but possessed something much more estimable, in an affectionate, devoted nature, which completely won our hearts. He had been sent forth from the parent nest at an early age, and it was pathetic to see the little fellow pursue his mother up and down the Piazza, flapping his wings, raising his little beak to hers, pleading for recognition. She invariably turned aside from him, ignoring his plaintive little "Wee-wee!" and as he was persistent, she usually left the Piazza.

This little performance was kept up for several days, till gradually little Pugie was content with the pettings we lavished upon him; whereupon he transferred his affection to us, joyously fluttering from the Piazza to our shoulders, as we entered the sitting-room. But, like all the pigeons, he was wonderfully discerning in never mistaking any other person for Doctor or me. Any one else approaching the window, or proffering grain,

was invariably the signal for their hasty flight.

“Doodle,” a beautiful squab resembling a Chantecler, was vivacity personified. He also begged for recognition from his parent, and receiving none, likewise lavished his demonstrations upon us. As with Pugie, Doctor was his especial attraction, and he would flutter into the room in a thrill of excitement, over to the morris chair, alighting on Doctor’s shoulder, coaxing to be petted and fed.

Each morning my maid had Doctor’s easy chair and reading table arranged near the window, with a large fresh sheet of crash covering the carpet, and a white cover over the table; and here, for a time each day, the pigeons were allowed to enter into what I called “the Pigeons’ Playground.” So appreciative were they of the privilege, seemingly so supremely happy, that we later called it “the Pigeons’ Paradise.”

Doodle and Pugie were very jealous of

each other, and had many encounters around the form in the large chair. Pugie, who was larger and stronger, resented Doodle's remaining on Doctor's shoulder or hand, and would pursue him from place to place, Doodle often seeking refuge on Doctor's head.

One morning, the impetuous little fellow flew into the room, alighting on a cabinet, and in much surprise surveyed his handsome reflection in the mirror; not, however, to his satisfaction. Mistaking his reflection for another pigeon, he immediately manifested his disapproval by pirouetting from foot to foot, uttering the little guttural sound which we called "scolding." Nearer and nearer he approached his beautiful little reflection, growing more fluffed up and angry each moment at what he evidently considered the impudence of this intruder. When quite close to his reflection, he directed an angry peck, and striking the mirror appeared convinced of his folly, and, seemingly much embarrassed, he made a hasty exit.

One beautiful spring afternoon, I returned home to find, as usual, the little "Rendezvous Club," as we called them, assembled on the Piazza, sunning themselves. Out of consideration for a new costume, I crossed the hall noiselessly, fearing an enthusiastic reception when they should see me. I held the portière aside to gaze on the scene so dear to me; but even so slight a movement was detected by the little ears, ever on the alert for my approach.

Doodle espied me and flew in on the nearest chair, expectant, yet half frightened lest it should be some one other than the one for whom they were all waiting. I wished to keep him aloof, yet was unwilling to frighten him too much, so merely uttered a deep sound of "*Boo! boo!*"

But I was unable to deceive the little rascal, who instantly flew across the room, alighting on my shoulder, peeping into my face with actual laughter in his beautiful bright eyes, and a little peck at my cheek, as if to say:

“I know you! You can’t fool me!”

His impetuosity often got him into trouble; once, with a very pathetic result. He followed me, one day, into the bed-room, fluttering around my shoulders, uttering the little sound of gladness peculiar to himself which we compared to the purring of a kitten. The unfamiliar surroundings, however, disconcerted him, and, a sudden outside noise occurring at the moment, he attempted a hasty flight through the window. The shade being partially lowered, his wings became entangled in the cord, and the more he struggled, the worse the situation became. I hastened to him, striving to liberate him, but his excitement and frightened resistance made the task almost impossible. I held him to me with one hand, endeavoring with the other to disentangle the cord, speaking soothingly to him; and presently he ceased resisting, and I praised him for his docility. In a moment I had unraveled the cord, and he was free to go. But to my consternation he

lay limp and motionless in my hands. He remained thus for several minutes, and, with a feeling of horror, I called my maid, telling her I feared little Doodle had died of fright. Presently, to my great relief, I felt a slight pulsation through his tiny frame, and I bore him to the sitting-room, to the Piazza where the other pigeons were, and, opening his eyes to the familiar scene, he fluttered out. He looked bewildered, as he stood there, panting, moving his wings to adjust his ruffled feathers; and then, without even taking a drink, he flew swiftly to his nest.

It was my first experience, and I trust it will be my last, of a little pigeon swooning in my hands.

I have since, however, had the more painful experience of a little pigeon dying in my hands. And as the little life was ebbing, he met my gaze as I held him to me, speaking endearingly to him; and presently closed his tired eyes, appeared lapsing into sleep, and pleasant dreams. The little wings extended

as if in expectation of flight, the tail expanded, the tiny form fluttered, and my little pigeon had passed away.

Then there was "Happy," a most interesting squab, whose sole desire was to please. She, also, was a great favorite with Doctor, and it was amusing to see the three jealous little rivals endeavoring to drive one another from the vicinity of the morris chair.

Happy had a very entertaining little "stunt" which we called "playing ball with Happy." It was I who originated it, to Happy's evident delight and quick understanding of her part in the performance.

Doctor, seated in the morris chair with pigeon food beside him, placing a few grains in his hand, would call Happy to him; I, sitting at a distance, also with pigeon food, would call, "Come, Happy!" and thus back and forth she would travel, her whole heart, apparently, in the little game.

She seemed willing to play indefinitely,

and appeared disappointed when we would discontinue, in consideration of her little physique, fearing to tire her, and also, over-feed her.

But it seemed her great desire to give pleasure to Doctor; and if I was in another part of the room, or otherwise occupied, she nevertheless wished to entertain. After eating a few grains from Doctor's hand, she would fly to the back of a chair, perch there an instant, and then return to Doctor. She seemed to think the little performance was expected of her, and repeated it again and again.

She and Pugie adjusted their little rivalry for Doctor's affection by happily mating; and it afforded me much pleasure to furnish material for their new home, and assist the little bride in the transportation.

CHAPTER XV

“JACK AND JILL”—“THE BURGLAR”

A VERY pretty phase of pigeon life presented itself about this time, in the appearance of little twin squabs, “Jack and Jill,” who were left at our window. Their parents had evidently instructed them that the corner of the sill was to be their future roost; and when, at sunset, the other pigeons had sought their respective sleeping quarters, Jack and Jill nestled together. Before settling to sleep, however, they “massaged” each other, as the parent bird does its young, and the mates, each other. In the morning the tender little performance was repeated, and, subsequently, each evening before repose, and each morning on awakening.

They were an affectionate pair of squabs, truly devoted to each other, though their

little beaks had ready pecks for other pigeons.

A threatening storm darkened the sunset hour, one day, and all the pigeons hastened home. The poor little twins had never seen a storm, and appeared much frightened when the wind arose. It was a mere storm of springtime, but I closed the window, as the gale was strong. Being shut out fairly terrified Jack and Jill, who besieged the window pane with their beaks, crying: “Wee-wee-wee!”

Their appeal was so pathetic that I raised the window, and two grateful little pigeons flew in, seeking refuge on the radiator, where they nestled down, gazing contentedly around the room.

When the storm had abated, I gently removed them to their usual sleeping-place, but they were unwilling to remain outside, and kept flying in, as I repeated the removal, again and again. Although it was contrary to my sense of propriety to harbor hale and

hardy pigeons, I did not have the heart to insist, a persuasive voice from within interceding for them—a voice that is always raised in behalf of God's mute creatures—and I made a little bed on the radiator, near the window, where they slept contentedly, after the customary “massage.”

And what precious little darlings they became, in their devotion to Doctor! They were jealous of other pigeons but not of each other. Every day after he had fed them, they would perch one on each shoulder, and shower pigeon caresses upon him: gentle little pecks around the neck, ears, and cheeks, and about the eyes, sometimes perilously close. Also, after receiving corn from his hands, they would go through a little process of “manicuring,” in a dainty fashion peculiar to themselves. Sometimes they would perch on his knees and play with the tassels of his robe, or alight on his slippered feet, and do a little criss-crossing, another mark of their affection. Or, if he were intent on book or

newspaper, they would take up a position on the floor, close to him, in a pretty posture that I called "saying their prayers."

Little "Squabsy," whose parents were unknown to us, came at a tender age, when she was very feeble. My heart went out to the little creature the moment I heard her plaintive "Wee-wee!" in protest at the rude treatment accorded her by her elders. I coaxed her into my hand, the soft, tiny mite, and she felt like a piece of moss, without substance. Once accustomed to my hand, she had no desire to leave it, and for a few days I spent much time caring for her and feeding her judiciously. She appeared to be suffering from some throat trouble—pigeons, I am told, are subject to diphtheria—and swallowed with difficulty. I selected the tiniest grains of pigeon food, which she appeared to relish, and in less than a week she was much improved, developing into a bright, happy little pigeon. She soon became quite capable of caring for herself, even to the extent of

searching around the room for the box containing pigeon food; and if she found the cover on it, she immediately attempted opening it with her tiny beak. And it was one of our numerous pigeon jokes to refer to this tender little creature, with soft, appealing eyes, as "*the burglar!*"

CHAPTER XVI

SHOT IN THE CORN FIELD

THIS little tragedy, with its happy termination, relates entirely to "Temper," who would not figure in these pages but for his thrilling experience one fatal day.

He was a handsome pigeon, very light gray and white in color, with wonderfully expressive eyes. He had been coming to the window for some time before we became friends, on account of his unlovely disposition. He seldom ate at the Piazza, usually coming for a drink after a flight across the Hudson, to the Jersey fields. But when with us, he was aggressive toward my pigeons, and surly and indifferent to my overtures to gain his confidence.

But one day he returned from Jersey in a pitiable condition, desperately wounded

whilst rifling corn. His breast was moist with crimson blood; his crop, filled with fresh ripe grain, protruded where the shot had entered. His feet could scarce sustain him, and such pathetic eyes I have never seen: the expression was almost an uttered cry of pain and desolation, as he sought a drink at the pigeons' basin.

He quenched his thirst in gasping sips, and during his efforts I counted over a dozen pieces of fresh, yellow corn in his distended crop. I knelt beside him, speaking soothingly, making it plain to him that I wished to help him. He clearly understood me, and met my gaze with a piteous, pleading look, of mingled gratitude and appeal, before flying to his roost, which was, fortunately, but a short distance away.

Later in the day, he returned for another sip of water, and I protected him from the rudeness of the pigeons who pushed him aside from the basin. Some irrepressible squabs even attempted to take the corn from

his crop, which was plainly visible through the skin. This deeply angered Temper, but he was too ill to defend himself. With marvelous intelligence he comprehended that I was befriending him, and stood close to my hand as I moved aside the other pigeons, even my special pets, in my efforts to feed him. He appeared hungry, but swallowed with difficulty, and I fed him grain by grain, with the smallest pieces. He wished to drink, and I held my hands around him, that the others might not disturb him. He gave me a look of tender gratitude from his sad, expressive eyes, and slowly flew away.

The next morning I awakened at day-break, and my first thought was of Temper. I went to the sitting-room and was scarcely surprised to find him at the window, alone, it being yet too early for the coming of the pigeons.

I sat beside the window and he came close to me, the same beautiful light in his eyes that I had seen the day before. I fed him

grain by grain until his hunger seemed appeased, and he took his little sip of water. He then stood close to me, looking into my eyes, as I talked to him. Presently the other pigeons came and Temper flew away.

Each morning about day-break we kept our little tryst. Sometimes I was there first, but had not long to wait for Temper. At other times he was standing expectant, gazing wistfully in, and as I approached the window would draw near to me. I talked caressingly whilst I fed him, and he responded with his wistful eyes; and invariably when the other pigeons came would fly away.

He would return, however, later in the day, for another meal, but with less happy results, the other pigeons resenting the attention he received. He understood throughout that I was befriending him, remaining close to my hands, relying confidently on me for protection.

And thus I cared for him, from day to day, insuring him the nourishment he needed,

and giving him the sympathy he seemed so much to appreciate. At first we feared it was a hopeless case, even a surgeon and a physician, who were interested in my protégé, giving me little encouragement; and I resolved at least to nourish and cheer him to the end.

But Nature proved a most tender mother and the wound in his breast began healing.

We wondered if on restoration to health he would resume his churlish manner—or could we expect a little pigeon to remember kindness and be grateful? I felt it mattered not, my sole desire being to relieve his suffering and keep him nourished.

His recovery seemed almost miraculous, so terrible had been the injury; but Mother Nature took excellent care of the case, and the gaping wound healed in a manner one would have expected only from expert treatment.

Temper was soon himself again, able to hold his own on the Piazza, and frequently

was the aggressor, as of yore. But toward me his attitude continued gentle and confiding. Seemingly he was not quite happy unless close to me, though no longer needing my protection.

I had given them all an early breakfast one morning, and returned to my dressing-room, when presently I was startled to find this beautiful gray pigeon at my feet. He looked up at me, gazing patiently until I was ready to return to the sitting-room, and then followed me.

This action was repeated for several mornings. He was not hungry; I had fed him well; he simply wished to be near me. And the curious feature was his not flying after me: when I would turn from the Pigeons' Window, he would simply alight on the floor and walk beside me. Then he would remain near the dresser, at my feet, until I was ready to return, when he would quietly walk after me. His action seemed so peculiar, so unlike a bird, that I called him "my little gray doggie."

And thus we became devoted friends, he growing stronger each day, and more attached; and I had every reason to feel proud of the result of my efforts in his behalf, for I was told that without proper sustenance he must have perished.

He would look into my eyes as I talked to him, and almost answer me; and I soon learned to love "my little gray doggie."

CHAPTER XVII

SOME PIGEON FEATS AND ANTICS

A NUMBER of years ago, when I made my first visit to St. Augustine, I was very much amused, on the arrival of the train, by witnessing a performance by several small, bare-footed negroes on the platform. To attract attention, admiration, and approbation, and incidentally a few coins, they executed the little acrobatic feat of standing on their heads and turning somersaults.

Some of my pigeons perform a little "stunt" which recalls the St. Augustine incident, "Carrier" being the originator.

Sitting one day near the window, absorbed in one of the exquisite sonnets of John Kendrick Bangs, I was interrupted by Carrier's striving to attract my attention. I can best describe his performance as a half-circle or

bow, which he made by jumping up about two feet, landing at a short distance from the starting point. (When he wishes to be *very* impressive, he makes the ascent higher, and the distance greater, sometimes inadvertently landing on a pigeon's back.)

"That was beautiful, Carrier!" I assured him, whereupon I was treated to an encore. I then repaid him with a fine, large grain of corn. The performance was repeated, he was again commended, receiving another piece of corn.

The other pigeons looked on in wonder and admiration, mingled, I fear, with envy at seeing Carrier the recipient of the favorite grain; whereupon Buster attempted the feat, very clumsily, but was, of course, rewarded for his effort.

Then two or three others ventured to perform, with laughable results, receiving sharp pecks from Carrier for interfering with his "show"; Carrier evidently not appreciating the fact that imitation is the most sincere

flattery. However, he was much gratified with the success of his performance, which subsequently was his greeting to me each morning, as I entered the sitting-room. His imitators were always quick to follow suit; and from thenceforth, although neglecting none of the pigeons, I always reserved a saucer of corn for the "talent."

"Winton," a particularly intelligent bird, who was an unsuccessful imitator of Carrier, entertained us one day with a little performance all his own. The pigeons have a little note of disapproval, "Ough! Ough!" when something displeases them. If, for example, some one approaches when Doctor and I are entertaining them with corn and caresses, they resent the interruption, and voice their displeasure with their little sound of protest. And as I was sitting at the window one morning, dispensing dainties, my maid entered the room to hand me letters. I turned to speak to Mattie, who was standing near a table, whereupon Winton uttered

his protesting "Ough! Ough!" No notice being taken of him, he flew into the room, alighting on the table, pirouetting in front of Mattie, uttering the guttural sound employed by the pigeons to each other, which we call scolding. Our laughter seemed to disconcert him and he flew back to the window.

They are all quite familiar with the box containing the pigeon food, and crane their necks expectantly when my hand approaches it. One or another will sometimes fly in and stand upon it, as if to assert possession. Others have a habit of criss-crossing the cover, as they do to our hands when coaxing to be fed.

But it remained for Happy to perform the clever feat of removing the lid, which she accomplished with much dexterity. It was interesting to watch her—she was such a serene little pigeon—engaging in her task with calm deliberation. When she first essayed it, she began by taking a careful sur-

vey of the box on the table. Walking around it, she proceeded in a most methodical manner to unravel the mystery of disclosing its contents. The box had a sliding cover, with a finger notch for opening it; but Happy directed her efforts to the side, inserting her little beak, striving to pry it open. Unsuccessful at one side, she attempted the other, whereupon Doctor placed the tip of his finger on the notch, which instantly enlightened Happy, who at once inserted her beak and drew the lid forward. To reward her ingenuity, we permitted her to partake as liberally as we deemed advisable. After that, she never made a mistake in removing the cover; but on one occasion it did not yield readily to her efforts, and when she finally succeeded, she manifested a delicious little bit of temper by pecking it viciously before partaking of the grain.

One of the most pleasing of my pigeon incidents, which also demonstrates their acute hearing, was Buster's responding to my call.

The bright spring day had ended, the sun was sinking in a globe of crimson beauty, as I closed the Pigeons' Window for the evening. Simultaneously, Buster alighted at the side, but, seeing the window down, instantly took his departure, as I hastily opened it.

"Buster!" I called, and although he was across the street, over the housetops, he immediately circled around, and in an instant was beside me. I then observed his beak was covered with food substance. He had evidently been feeding his squab; and I spread another meal for him. How hungry he was! although just before sunset he had been eating heartily with the other pigeons. I was delighted that I had espied him when he came at the eleventh hour, otherwise dear old Buster would have gone to bed hungry.

CHAPTER XVIII

“KISSIE CORN” AND MUSIC

THEY all take very naturally to what I call “Kissie Corn,” regarding it as a mark of special favor. It consists in Doctor’s placing a grain of corn between his lips, offering it in this fashion to an expectant beak. They all vie with each other in being the favored one, crowding on Doctor’s shoulders, which, being broad, accommodate several at a time; and, from this happy point of vantage, they endeavor to reach the coveted dainty. I must admit there is much discourtesy, and a decided lack of chivalry, among the competitors, but the little beaks, raised so eagerly, make a pretty picture. I like the little performance for hygienic reasons, also; for we are sometimes prone, I fear, to overfeed them. Feeding several hun-

gry applicants, who are neither polite, nor considerate of one another, from a well-filled hand, is apt to engender hasty swallowing, and consequent indigestion. But the “Kissie Corn” is given piece by piece, and turn about, as Doctor strives to be impartial. And in between the courses, they are encouraged to sing; for we have some vocalists in our midst. The music is not altogether melodious, being a little monotonous chant or dirge; but some make it more tuneful than others. What surprises us is the fact that the females never sing; it is the male birds, alone, and only a few of them.

Doctor will sometimes hold a pigeon on his hand, dancing him up and down, singing an accompaniment, and the pigeon will respond with his own little song. His dance, however, is usually of short duration, some jealous rival hastening to displace him.

And thus their lives go on from day to day, with little variation; affording pleasant diversion to us, and supreme happiness, I

think, to them. We love them for the affection and devotion they display toward us, in gratitude for our attention. And we appreciate their wonderful sagacity and discrimination in not making friends easily. Even toward Mattie they manifest, with few exceptions, much aloofness. But that is pardonable, for although she is a genuine friend, keeping their Piazza and Playground scrupulously neat and clean, they resent the appearance of brush and dust-pan. Consequently Mattie receives many "scoldings" from them, when the hour for "play-time" is ended.

There was, however, one little pigeon whom I called "Mattie's squab," who appreciated her having rescued him from the bathtub, one day when I was out. The enterprising little fellow wandered from Piazza to the sitting-room, through the bed-room, when Mattie was in another part of the suite, and evidently lost himself. Crossing the hall, Mattie was attracted by the fluttering

of wings, and following the sound, discovered the poor little frightened pigeon at the bottom of the empty bath-tub. Being very young, he was too inexperienced to accomplish an upward flight, and was rescued with much difficulty, not having sufficient confidence in Mattie to trust himself to her hands; she being, I think, almost as frightened as he. However, from that day he was “Mattie’s squab,” and frequently ate from her hand.

CHAPTER XIX

PIGEON LOVE AND CONFIDENCE

I DO not criticize or condemn those who care less than I for these gentle feathered creatures. We are not all similarly constituted, and I recognize the fact that to many a little squab is never so attractive as when served on toast: that pigeons are vexations except *en cassollette*. I know that my pigeons are not angels, and being very material little creatures, likewise thoughtless of the sensibilities of us humans, are prone to decorate window sill and ledges in most in-artistic fashion.

But let us regard the French proverb: "*Il ne faut pas juger des gens par leurs défauts*"; and judge not one another by our shortcomings. And I, who know whereof I

peak, can testify to the fidelity and love of pigeons for their benefactors.

Is a little creature hurt or wounded?—he promptly seeks the Piazza for sympathy and aid. Has he been shot?—with the warm blood dripping from his little wound, he hastens to the place where he is sure of comfort. He seems to know instinctively that absorbent cotton and antiseptic ointment, together with willing hands, are in readiness to serve him.

And even in their frights they hasten to us. Poor Pointie thought one day that the last day had surely come, and promptly sought a refuge where he was sure of welcome. A heavy snow, fallen in the night, was glistening in the clear morning sunshine. Pointie, on his little personal veranda just above his dove-cote, was chanting his pæan of praise and gratitude for his happy life when lo! an avalanche of soft white substance submerged his confident little figure and proudly lifted head. He thought, per-

haps, it had descended from the heavens; whereas it was the mere commonplace proceeding of house-men clearing the roof. However, Pointie's instinct for self-preservation gave impetus to his wings as he hastened to the Piazza. The window was open, but the lace curtains were drawn across. But Pointie was determined to enter, and his energetic beak separated the curtains and in a moment he was on the floor, moving agitatedly about. We spoke soothingly to him, but he walked beyond us into the hall, and seeing the door of a large clothes closet standing open, selected it as his place of refuge.

I followed him, speaking caressingly, and kneeling near him, extended my hand, an invitation that he always loved. With his usual confidence he alighted in my hand, but objected to being borne to the window, hastening again to the closet, seeming to think safety lay in darkness. To render it less attractive to him I turned on the electric light;

and by much coaxing persuaded him to return to my hand. But it was some time before I succeeded in convincing him that no harm would befall him on the Piazza with the other pigeons. After a while he overcame his fear and returned to his nest.

How I should love to see the interior of that dove-cote! It must be of a spacious character, for Pointie is the father of many children, mostly twins, and I have never had the pleasure of teaching his highly cultured little ones to eat. Some of the tiny squabs who have been left by their parents on the Piazza, and whom Mattie describes as "not half hatched," although hungry, gaze indifferently at the pigeon food in my hand, not understanding what it is, play with it, tossing it about with their little beaks, and then jump into my hand, snuggling down and making a bed of what I have intended for their breakfast. Later, seeing the older pigeons come to eat, the grain in my hand becomes to them a revelation of deepest joy.

But the Pointies are very conscientious and devoted parents, housing their little ones until fully grown and amply able to care for themselves. Hence I conclude their little home is large enough to accommodate four pigeons at a time comfortably. I can fancy it a cosy pigeon suite of several rooms. And the nest is undoubtedly a most important feature in a pigeon's life. It is, I am sure, the center of their existence: all their joys and sorrows are woven therein.

But Pointie's adventure in the snow had not the pathos of a little midnight visitor we received one time in summer. We called her "Mopie," this ailing little squab, because her predilection was to sit alone all day in an attitude of brooding. She seemed disinclined or unable to partake of food, and was losing strength each day. I tried to coax her to take some milk, but she appeared to dislike it, preferring merely to sit quietly in the sun till the last pigeon had left the Piazza, when she would take her departure across the Square.

But this quiet summer evening we were amazed to see a little shadow flitting past our eastern window, around the corner to the Piazza. We took her in, poor little Mopie, whose instinct seemed to warn her that her life was ebbing, wishing to be near us at the last. Or else she came seeking relief, suffering unmistakably from asthma, gasping for breath. We burned asthmatic pastilles near her, as I held her in my hand, and soon she manifested distinct relief, but not for long. With parted beak, the gasping was resumed, each gasp fainter than the one before; and as I held her toward the summer breeze, telling her she was my dearest little pigeon, the little head fell limply on my fingers; and as our clock was chiming twelve her suffering was over.

CHAPTER XX

PIGEON GRATITUDE AND TENDERNESS

RETURNING from the country one year, we were wondering which of our pigeons would be the first to greet us. It proved to be a little unnamed squab, who had developed into a pigeon during our absence. Being the first one to discover our return, we called him Christopher Columbus, shortening it to Christy.

I had paid him unusual attention one morning when he was on the Piazza alone, giving him the choicest portion of the menu; and having satisfied his appetite, he flew across the Square, to his nesting place. But in a few moments he returned, looking very curious as he approached by reason of the object he was carrying in his bill; and he placed before me a bright new hairpin! He

looked straight into my eyes as I thanked him, and then immediately flew away.

How could I construe the pretty act, except as a little thank-offering!

Some of the pigeons, especially the squabs of an affectionate disposition, give a charming little manifestation of their grateful love, by forming with their little beaks a gentle tracery over our hands, very suggestive of the finest lace. They also go through a little process of manicuring, consisting of the tenderest little pecks over our hands and finger tips, which is very endearing. They are, as a rule, gentle little creatures, with, of course, some exceptions.

One little fellow was so much addicted to molesting his neighbors, that we christened him "The Fighter." Even I was not exempt from his predilection, and it used to charm me to place myself on the defensive, though I usually was the aggressor, challenging him by pulling a feather, asking:

"Do you want to fight me?"

And his menacing attitude and flashing eye was almost an uttered answer of:

"Yes I do!"

"Very well," I would say, "come along, although I'm dreadfully afraid of you!" and the combat would begin.

In justice to myself I will mention that I always fought fair, by using only one hand. And to reconcile my conscience to the reprehensible conduct of teasing a little pigeon, I keep in mind the fact that he would rather fight than eat.

Bending forward, I would pull his tail, which he considered a terrible insult; and he would pounce upon my hand and peck me. I would draw back telling him I was frightened to death, at the same time pulling his beak. Then he would advance, flapping me vigorously with his wing, and whilst it was raised, I would tickle him; a worse insult than pulling his tail.

But in a few moments I would withdraw my hand, telling him he had won the battle.

“And now we must make up, for we weren’t really angry, were we? We love each other, don’t we? We were only teasing each other, were we not? And now we must have a pretty dinner.”

By this time his anger would be appeased, and he would draw near to me, very much interested as I produced the boxes. Before I spoke again, his anger would have entirely vanished, his eyes softened, and his whole demeanor became as gentle as the proverbial dove.

“Now, what shall we have first?—A little cracked corn as the *hors-d’œuvre*? Does that taste nice? Shall we have delightful hempseed as an *entrée*? Some pigeon food as the *pièce de résistance*? And your own beloved new corn for dessert? Now isn’t that a delicious dinner? Ah! you shake your feathers and wend your way to the fountain for a drink. How thirsty you were! Don’t go yet; come, take another piece of corn; here, you left it in my hand. That’s right!

Haven't we had a lovely time this morning? Good-bye!"

But one day Mrs. Pointie was digesting a hearty luncheon, perched on the side of the basin, when Fighter came along and I challenged him. Her little eyes nearly started out of her head when she saw him rush at me, and I retreated in pretended fright. She darted from her perch to the other end of the Piazza where the fight was in progress, and placing herself in front of my hand, directed peck after peck at Fighter.

Was it any wonder that I felt a renewal of love for my little champion!

I often, in thought, compare my pigeons with those beautiful ones at San Marco, Venice. It delighted me to feed the Venetian pigeons after purchasing the bags of corn from the venders. I thought them pretty and tame, and enjoyed having them around me. But they never appealed to my heart as these, my New York pigeons do,

for they impressed me as being tame merely through stress of hunger, whereas our pigeons love us for ourselves, and delight in being near us even when there is no question of food. If they are sunning themselves at one window, and hear our voices at another, they immediately change their quarters to be near us. Some of them have located my dressing-room window, and love to peer in at me.

One in particular, "Burnsy," a grandchild of Winton, who was christened when a squab, having flown into the window and perched on the radiator when the heat was full on. I was feeding the pigeons at the window, and on turning around, discovered him hopping from foot to foot, not having sense enough to know that he was being burned, when I rescued him. I covered my left hand thickly with cold cream, filling the other with pigeon food; and under the pretense that I was giving him his breakfast, succeeded in keeping him standing in the

cold cream for some time.

Although Doctor is his special favorite, he loves me, too, and is very much interested in my toilet each morning. He is now a large bird, and it is highly amusing to see him stand, literally on his tip toes, to reach a part of the lace curtain through which he can peer most easily, as I sit before my dresser. I tell Doctor he wishes to make sure what kind of hairpins I am using. When I discover him gazing in, I call to him:

“It is all right, Burnsy; you will approve of these hairpins, I am sure!”

He is one of our most affectionate pigeons, but has a jealous and irascible temper. The only fault, however, I have to find with him, is his harshness towards Nydia, my little blind pigeon.

One year at Naples when exploring the marvels of Pompeii, while the courier was discussing antiquities with the scientific member of my family, in a language unlearned by me, I was lost in a labyrinth of musing

over scenes in Lord Lytton's wonderful work. And I thought if ever I had a blind pet, its name should be Nydia. That was a number of years ago, and it is only recently I have had the misfortune of possessing a pet to whom the appellation is appropriate.

She came to the Piazza one day, small and young, yet older than a squab, the sight utterly gone from one eye. I was really ashamed of the reception she received from my pigeons, in their strenuous efforts to exclude her from the Piazza. For the "Rendezvous Club" is of a most exclusive character, in fact is a close corporation, intended solely for the benefit of the old families of the Square, and their descendants.

However, I had little difficulty in imparting to Nydia the fact that she had a staunch protector, and that my hand was always ready to hold her aloft from her tormentors. My authority was recognized by all, Burnsy being my only rebellious subject. It angered him to see this intruder treated as an old and

honored member of the Club; and he did not disguise his resentment.

One day he was pirouetting and scolding to an unusual extent, joining another jealous pigeon in pecking her little feet and legs as I held her above their heads. I raised my hand higher, beyond their reach, when Burnsy caught at the lace at my wrist, shaking it in a perfect paroxysm of anger. I tapped his head, reproving him for a very naughty pigeon, saying:

“What would Doctor say if he saw you tearing my sleeve, Burnsy? Do you think he would let you take a nap on his shoulder, if he knew you were so naughty to me?”

And, as if understanding me, unloosening his grasp, he stood aside, rebuked and penitent.

Placing Nydia in a quiet corner which she always selects, I arranged a little luncheon beside her, and gave my attention to Burnsy. Producing some corn I called him to me, saying:

“Do you see that beautiful golden sheen over the river, Burnsy? That is a reflection of the setting sun. Let it not go down on thy wrath! Come, Burnsy dear, let us play ‘Kissie Corn’!”

CHAPTER XXI

FINALE

THESE little anecdotes might be prolonged indefinitely, so many incidents occur each day.

We have now many pigeons and squabs at our window, no two quite alike in disposition, thus contributing to the liveliness on the Piazza. We have even concluded that we have some charming little suffragettes in our pigeon colony, as the male birds have considerable difficulty in persuading their mates that the home is their province, and that the *ménage* is being neglected. But the little females appear quite fascinated with the Piazza, declining to be sent to the dove-cote; and the males pursue them, administering reprimanding pecks in protest. I infer there is some nest-duty to be attended to,

and the instinct of the male bird appears very keen in this regard.

However, they afford us much amusement, particularly one couple who seem to differ very much in opinion on the subject; the wilful little female usually seeking final refuge on Doctor's arm, where her mate does not pursue her, seeming to think she is encouraged and protected in her wrong-doing.

Retrospective musing fills me with surprise regarding the pigeons, at one time so timid and cautious. For it was not my intention to tame them; I wished merely to be kind to them, contribute to their happiness, and brighten their little lives; and their confidence and affection is simply marvelous. For four years, now, the pigeons and I have been dear to each other.

I very soon learned that in many ways they are much like humans, and that we somewhat resemble them. Indeed, I have in mind a couple who remind me very much of pigeons, in their devotion to each other and

to their little home life, almost to the exclusion of the outside world. I often laughingly refer to them as "pigeons."

I always have a pang of regret when leaving home, for a time, lest our pigeons suffer by our absence; and I am entirely in sympathy with the poet, in his charming verses, published not long ago, when he sings:

“For all the time the heart of me,
The better, sweeter part of me,
Was sobbin’ for the robin,
In the fields of Ballyclare.”

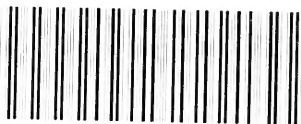


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